JUSTIFICATION BY IGNORANCE: A NEO-PROTESTANT MOTIF?

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Of all the New Testament doctrines mythologized by neo-Protestant theologians, none has fared worse than justification by faith.

One ploy of recent modern theology has been its constant appeal to the majestic Reformation principle of *sole fidei* to divorce Christian belief both from the certainty of objectively revealed truths (in the inspired prophetic-apostolic Scriptures) and from any firm grounding in external historical events (particularly the substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ).

To be sure, the Bible's rejection of salvation by human effort rules out man's ability to relate himself acceptably to the Living God by the genius of the human mind no less than by the energies of the will and emotions. God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than man's—higher still than sinful man's, who can not achieve Divine acceptance whether by intellectual ingenuity or moral striving.

But the lifeline of the Protestant Reformation was its rediscovery of the Scriptures—truth that God offers to penitent believers, hopelessly guilty in their strivings to achieve salvation by works, the benefits of Jesus Christ's meditation on the Cross. God acquits sinners, solely on the ground of a righteousness which He himself provides, a righteousness made known by intelligible Divine revelation and embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a righteousness available to sinful men by faith alone.

But recent modern theologians have extended the Protestant principle of soteriological justification into a perverse speculative theory of epistemological justification by skepticism. Many neo-Protestant writers contend that the religious-ethical principle of justification solely by faith must be expanded to include a religious-intellectual corollary. In deference to Divine revelation, man must not only renounce speculative rationalism, but supposedly must also repudiate all cognitive knowledge about God in order to give faith the right-of-way. Some recent statements consequently expound justification by faith in a manner that would destroy both the indispensable historical content and the indispensable knowledge content of revealed religion. "Justification by faith" becomes an

*An address by Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, president of the Evangelical Theological Society, to the annual dinner meeting of The Society on Monday night, December 29, 1969, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Dr. Henry is Editor-at-Large of *Christianity Today* and Visiting Professor of Theology in Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa.

abstract speculative principle through which its neo-Protestant advocates undermine much, if not all, that the New Testament and the Protestant Reformers considered essential to their exposition of the doctrine.

According to the contemporary view, intellectual faith-justification requires the rejection of any claim to divinely-revealed truths to the historical factuality of saving events and to the scientific credibility of Biblical miracles. Faith which justifies, it is said, has nothing to do with revealed information and external events: it is essentially trust in God devoid of cognitive knowledge.

That faith should liberate man's conscience, rather than burden it, was indeed one of Luther's emphases. But to turn this freedom into a theological necessity for emptying Christian belief of revelational truths and of the historical actuality of redemptive events is arbitrarily to misappropriate a Reformation principle and to pervert it.

Yet almost every influential neo-Protestant theologian in the recent past—including Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, F. Gogarten, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich and the Niebuhrs—has misused "justification by faith alone" to discount or dismiss the cognitive content and historical foundations of Christian faith.[1] Some have done worse than others: they have turned justification by faith into an apology for non-Christian theology while evaporating at the same time the great distinctives of Biblical religion. Some statements virtually reduce faith to courageous ignorance.

The early Barth contended that God confronts man and precipitates spiritual crisis by exposing the ambiguity of man's religious life. Barth insisted, however, that Divine revelation does not convey truths and that faith is a "not-knowing" (*The Epistle to the Romans,* London, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 88). His later efforts to rescue an intellectual or cognitive significance for faith came too late and was, in any case, too halting. Barth's early emphasis on a cognitively-contentless revelation was nonetheless coordinated with God's exclusive revelation in Jesus Christ; later theologians traveling the same route of "not-knowing"-faith freed Divine disclosure from a necessary connection with Jesus Christ.

Everyone of the dialectical and/or existential theologians insists that any and all religious truth-claims are ambiguous; existentialism's repudiation of every attempt to speak objectively of God was, therefore, destined for special welcome. Revelation is regarded not as an objective Divine

1. Thomas F. Torrance too stresses that "justification by the grace of God in Jesus Christ applies not only to our life and action, but to our knowledge, and is essentially relevant to epistemology" (*Theological Science,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 198). He likewise develops the thesis in a speculative way. The emphasis in Torrance falls on justification by *grace,* in conformity with the Barthian view that although Divine revelation assertedly is not externally given, our concepts become adequate to God through an internal miracle and personal decision in which the structures of the human mind are said to be radically altered. Thus Torrance too sacrifices the objective validity of theological truth.

communication of truths about God and His purposes, but rather as internal and paradoxical spiritual encounter. Revelation, in this view, has for its correlate not knowledge but trust; justification by faith, in consequence, is correlated with intellectual doubt.

Bultmann considers his whole demythological projection of faith and understanding as a task wholly "parallel to St. Paul's and Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone. . . . Or rather, it carries this doctrine to its logical conclusion in the field of epistemology." ('Bultmann Replies to His Critics,' in *Kerygma and Myth* [Hans Werner Bartsch, ed.], London, S.P.C.K., 1953, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1961, pp. 210 f.). Insists Bultman: "Indeed, de-mythologizing is the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought. . . . There is no difference between security based on good works and security built on objectifying knowledge." (*Jesus Christ and Mythology,* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, p. 84).

Faith is correlated with the word alone, but this word of proclamation has no basis in revealed truths or historical saving events inasmuch as the modern world-view is assumed to have ruled out the supernatural. The act of God in the Christ-event, however, that meets us in the preached word, assertedly enables man in faith to experience authentic life.

After first whittling down Paul's entire christology to justification by faith, Bultmann then reinterprets the latter to mean that man can experience "new life" by foregoing all self-justifying effort—in which category Bultmann includes any confidence in divinely disclosed truths. The authority and evidential value of the prophetic-apostolic writings is excluded as a support for faith since to buttress belief objectively would contribute to self-justification by obscuring the possibility of a new mode of existence in terms of radical faith. If authentic existence is defined as *existentiell* self-understanding, then assurance that rests on externally valid beliefs and objective factors must belong to inauthentic existence. Bultmann welcomes negative historical criticism for the support it gives to his theological slant. The assaults of naturalistic philosophy of science and of historical positivism upon external miracles in nature and history enjoy undisputed free course. Reformation theology cannot base faith upon any 'work,' and in this category Bultmann includes any fruit of historical and scientific inquiry. Faith must rest, instead, solely upon the preached word (although why this, too, cannot be critically viewed as in some sense also a 'work' is unclear). Bultmann concentrates the entire reality of revelation upon the event of preaching. Theological propositions are true only as existential statements, and only through faith alone is God knowable (which is Bultmannian shorthand for authentic self-understanding).

"Faith alone" here means existential decision without dependence on supernatural supports, historical happenings, cognitive content or

external evidence. Unlike Barth, who maintained the necessity of Jesus Christ's substitutionary death and external resurrection, Bultmann retains the supernatural and miraculous only as myth and not as objective reality. For Bultmann the essence of justification by faith is trust in God's act experienced in existential response to the preached word in the absence of objective knowledge and external considerations.

But if Bultmann insists nonetheless on the reality of God apart from our faith, while denying God's knowability outside of faith, H. Braun radicalizes Bultmann's existentialism to the point where the existence of God is wholly identical with the self-understanding of man in faith. Braun reduces the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith to the ethical tension of "I sought" and "I may." The apostles sound forth Jesus' call to moral transformation in terms of the paradoxical unity of God's radical demand and radical grace. By first understanding and proclaiming the faith that unites God's demand with His grace and hence justifies Jesus provided historical impetus for justification. But Braun holds that justification can be verified elsewhere in human experience. Anthropology, according to Braun, is the New Testament constant, and christology the variable. Despite his dismissal of the independent reality of God, and despite the dispensability in principle of Jesus of Nazareth (the moral paradox at the heart of the doctrine of justification might, in theory, have been uncovered by another person remarkably dissimilar to the Man of Galilee), Braun nonetheless espouses justification by faith, however deviantly.

Since faith is presumably independent of conceptual knowledge and of historical events, F. Gogarten ventures a restatement of justification which makes possible both the complete and radical autonomy of the physical and historical sciences and man's total reliance upon them in shaping the future (cf. *The Reality of Faith*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1959, ch. x). Justification by faith is, therefore, not related to man's individual moral and spiritual predicament before God; instead, it sanctions man's shaping of the word and of history by reason and science alone, rather than their forfeiture to religious incredulity.[2]

2. Helmuts Thielicke ventures to extend the doctrine of justification by faith through the whole reality of the world in another way. He aims to "decline the Reformation doctrine of justification through all the cases provided by the grammar of our existential life" (*Einfuhrung in die christliche Ethik*, Munich, 1963, pp. 10 f., quoted by Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, p. 185). The guiding principle of action throughout the whole range of social ethics is supplied by God's justification of man through faith alone: God's love which man experiences in justification by faith constrains man to exercise love to others. Thielicke insists, however, on the resurrection of Jesus Christ as decisive for the destiny of man and the world. But he takes Luther's principle to be true not only of the individual in his sinful state, but considers it also the principle of Christian involvement in the world. The total reality of the world is to be embraced by faith in God's present patience and in God's final provision of righteousness. The present aeon is already under the harassing fire of the age to come, and its social institutions must be challenged by the Divine commandment of love. For Thielicke, as for many recent theologians, however, Divine revelation is conceptually imprecise, and man lacks specific directives for the implementation of God's will in the world.

Gogarten misappropriates Luther's great doctrine to advance his own connection of faith with secularization as a Christian phenomenon: for Gogarten the revelation of Jesus Christ is the direct and original basis of secularization. Jesus' unreserved trust in the Father fully exposes the fact that the cosmos and history, contrary to the prevalent pagan beliefs, are not controlled by divinatory powers. As son of the Father, man is now wholly free, in view of his confidence in the Creator, to become lord of the world—so Gogarten contends—through unlimited use of reason and science. In other words, the secularization of society assertedly has a Divine mandate; man can fulfill his responsibility in the world only by aggressive reliance on reason alone rather than on faith; the limitless use of reason and science are the means by which we must advance the order, unity, coherence and future of the world. But, says Gogarten, only faith in God as Creator frees man for this total reliance on reason. Man's understanding of the world as God's creation is, therefore, the equivalent of man's justification in God's sight. In this way the doctrine of justification, forcibly detached from the whole framework of supernatural revelation and miraculous redemption, gives a speculative exposition in terms of man's freedom to enlist science to fulfill his culture-mandate in the world and history.

In America it was Tillich who carried the modern distortion of justification by faith to its most extreme misunderstanding. Repeatedly Tillich claimed the Pauline and Lutheran doctrine of justification to be the foundation of his entire theological outlook. The essence of that doctrine, he insisted, is as indispensable today as in the first and sixteenth centuries. But he went on to say, a reinterpretation and wholly new understanding of it are necessary: "This idea is strange to the man of today and even to Protestant people in the churches" and is now "scarcely understandable even to our most intelligent scholars. . . . And we should not imagine that it will be possible in some simple fashion to leap over this gulf and resume our connection with the reformation again." (*The Protestant Era,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 196.)

Tillich proposes to revive and reinterpret justification by faith not merely as an article of the creed, but also, by relating man to God as the Ground of all being, as the comprehensive frame through which ultimate reality is to gain new power in universal human life. Tillich's radically conceived view detaches justification by faith from its historical doctrinal understanding—namely, from the biblical view of God, of Christ, of redemption—and boldly turns it into a formula for repudiating of supernatural theism.

In view of man's inability by human striving to protect himself against devastating threats to survival and existence, Tillich expounds implications of justification by faith for cultural autonomy. Neither right beliefs nor spiritual activity, nor any other achievement on man's part, he says, can stave off the ultimate condemnation of man's efforts to failure. But justification means that man is *accepted* as he is, without

even striving for acceptance; it declares that grace is available, and that man's estrangement from God is overcome in reconciliation and new being.

To see in such presentation the New Testament content of justification by faith is to misunderstand Tillich. He calls man to no particular beliefs, to no intellectual presuppositions whatever, to no specific spiritual affirmations—not even to the definition or acknowledgement of Divine grace, nor to the naming of God's Name. According to Tillich, the Protestant principle assertedly implies that "there cannot be a truth in human minds which is divine truth itself. Consequently, the prophetic spirit must always criticize, attack, and condemn sacred authorities, doctrines and morals" (*ibid.*, p. 226). Protestantism must proclaim the judgment that brings assurance by depriving us of all security and must proclaim our having truth in the very absence of truth (even of religious truth). "*You are accepted,* accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. . . . *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!*" (*The Shaking of the Foundations,* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, p. 162). Hence, in his application of justification by faith to the religious aspect of man's ethical life, Tillich divorces Divine acceptance of man from specific doctrinal beliefs.

He goes still farther by applying the justification-theory to the whole intellectual side of religion in such a way that the skeptic is no less divinely justifiable than the striver who merely believes himself to be accepted. Doubt is said to unfold within itself an infinite passion for the truth and faith is assertedly hidden inside skepticism. If justifying faith involves no specific cognitive content, the skeptic who has hidden faith must also be regarded as somehow in the truth and in unity with Being itself: "The paradox got hold of me," said Tillich, "that he who seriously denies God, affirms him" (*The Protestant Era,* preface, p. xv). So then justification by faith is universally assured, even to those who find belief in God an impossibility. On Tillich's premises "there is no possible atheism": God is present in every act of faith, even if this faith expressly denies the very existence of God. If correct ideas are a dispensable 'work' in relation to justification by faith, then neither incorrect ideas nor ideas in suspense or doubt can disqualify one from justification by faith—just so long as one is earnestly involved. "Go with Pilate, if you cannot go with Jesus; but go in seriousness with him!" writes Tillich of Pilate's doubts concerning the truth (*The New Being,* p. 68).

This is not all. Tillich gives an even more radical, more universal, more abstract statement of justification by faith. Not only for the skeptic, in whose doubt faith is said to be nonetheless present as a presupposition, but even for one committed to a meaning is justification possible without intellectual reversal. Heinz Zahrnt summarizes Tillich's position as follows: "the courage which looks despair in the face already *is* faith, and the act of taking meaninglessness on oneself is a meaningful act" (*The Question of God,* London, Collins, 1969, p. 344).

In his closing chapter of *The Courage to Be,* written in 1952, Tillich suggested that the very term "faith" desperately needs modern reinterpretation, then proceeds to analyse the experience of courage, connecting, in the face of meaninglessness, the courage to be, with the power of being, or the Ground of all being. "By affirming our being, we participate in the self-affirmation of being-itself. There are no valid arguments for the 'existence' of God, but there are acts of courage in which we affirm the power of being, whether we know it or not. . . . Courage has revealing power, the courage to be is the key to meaning itself." (*The Courage to Be,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1952, p. 181). Tillich's closing words are "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt" (*ibid.*, p. 190). The experience, undirected, without specific content, that appeals to no special Divine revelation but takes into itself doubt and meaninglessness in the bald confidence that one is accepted, Tillich calls "absolute faith." Its sole presupposition is the Ultimate, the "God above God," beyond describable identity. Absolute faith is faith without a theology, without words and concepts, yet is faith in the trans-personal presence of the Divine, the depth of things, the ultimate Ground.

For Tillich, in other words, there is no unconditional truth of faith except one, and that is, it would appear, that no one possesses any such truth. Despite this disclaimer, however, Tillich was somehow misled into believing justification in the Tillichian reinterpretation to be an indispensable truth, and this at the high cost of scuttling the biblical truth of the self-revealing God and the truth of justification by faith in the understanding of the Book of Romans and in the experience of the Reformers. In his exposition, justification gains a universal significance that goes beyond Protestantism, beyond Catholicism, beyond Christianity itself. Tillich's concept loses both the God of the Bible and the supernatural redemption and rescue of sinful man. In short, by elaborating justification as a speculative principle the way he does, Tillich forfeits justification as a supernatural provision of Divine grace. Quite clearly, then, with Gogarten and Tillich, the justification-principle takes on essentially post-Protestant and non-Christian features. Not only in its content emptied of New Testament essentials, but its form is shaped by theosophy rather than by theology. A justification that requires even Christians to give up all their revealed knowledge of God, to surrender supernatural realities, to forego the metaphysical significance of Jesus Christ, is a justification totally foreign to the first Christians. As Zahrnt observes, if the people who longed at the waning of the Middle Ages for a more authentic way of speaking about God, had thought that Luther's Reformation must necessarily end this way, they would "have put their hands over their ears in horror and cried: 'Anything but that!' " (*op. cit.,* p. 359).

Nowhere did neo-Protestant theology seriously question its speculative extensions and reformulations of justification in terms of radical

faith. Rather, justification was made to imply the epistemological theory that all knowledge is historically conditioned, that faith requires the rejection of objective truths, that faith is disinterested in the historical actuality of saving events, that even the severest criticism of the natural and historical sciences could in no way jeopardize the vitality and propriety of faith; Protestantism, moreover, was held to historically sponsor and license these views.

In his early writings, Barth had insisted that the revelation of the Living God is confined to Jesus Christ. He later acknowledged that this view could not rest simply on the contention that Divine revelation enlists only non-intellectual trust in its exposure of the ambiguity of man's righteousness. In his earlier view, faith was considered to be implicit in the question "Who am I?," and accessible to man as man; its connection with God's unique act in Christ, therefore, seemed hardly necessary. He came to see, however, that to flatly reject objective knowledge of God and historical revelation threatened to dissolve Divine disclosure into theological subjectivism. Under counter-pressure by Bultmann and existentialists, Barth, therefore, increasingly sought to inform faith with cognitive significance, and stressed the external objectivity of Christ's resurrection, although he continued to place the event beyond the reach of historical inquiry.

Despite Barth's maneuverings toward revelational quasi-objectivity in history and in cognition, not only Bultmann but also many post-Bultmannian theologians continue to combine their insistence on God's once-for-all disclosure in Jesus Christ with the costly thesis that faith is consistent with radical doubt. For all the assertion of the "new quest" of the historical Jesus, Gerhard Ebeling, for instance, contends that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith is mirrored in the unqualified abandonment of historical considerations to critical methodology: "Protestantism of the nineteenth century, by deciding in principle for the critical historical method, maintained and confirmed...the decision of the Reformers in the sixteenth century" (*Word and Faith,* Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1963, p. 55). Ebeling's interest is not the vindication of authentic as against spurious historical claims. In his essay on "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism," he postulates an inner connection between justification by faith, which assertedly requires us to live without any kind of security, and critical-historical methodology which undercuts any assurance that faith might find in external hitorical facts.

The announced effort of some post-Bultmannians to maintain some measure of historical rootage for Christian faith would in principle sacrifice, as Van Austin Harvey rightly comments, "the [special] meaning of justification by faith which the 'new questers' also want to preserve" (*The Historian and the Believer,* London, S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1967, pp. 196 f.). Most post-Bultmannians in fact really have no desire to reassert

a historical or rational justification of faith.[3] Ernst Fuchs, for example, still insists no less strenuously than Bultmann that to ground faith in objective demonstration would involve the human intellect in a form of illusory self-justification. A free faith would be precluded, he contends, if belief in the gospel of the risen Christ were established by eye-witnesses: "The witnesses of a particular, repeated happening are in competition with faith, and what they have seen is in competition with the gospel which is to be believed" (*Gessamelte Aufsatze,* Tubingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1965, Vol. III, p. 276). So, too, Hans Conzelmann combines historical skepticism and cognitive uncertainty with existential justification in a manner that detaches faith from objective truth about God and the factuality of Christ's resurrection (*An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament,* New York, Harper & Row, 1969).

It becomes increasingly apparent that the dialectical-existential severance of Divine revelation from rational cognizability and from external historical events leads inevitably to the loss both of special and of general revelation, since it hopelessly weakens the meaning of the term revelation.[4] To be sure, the rejection of intelligible divine disclosure and of external divine revelation in nature and history was correlated in dialectical-existential theology, in its alternative emphasis solely on personal non-propositional confrontation, with an insistence that God confronts man only in and through his Word, Jesus Christ. Yet Bultmann's view of faith as authentic human existence, or self-surrender inspired by the symbol of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, not only leaves in doubt the indispensability of a past unique act of God in Jesus of Nazareth, but also accommodates the logical possibility of another symbol of faith serviceable to those to whom Christ is unknown. If the faith that justifies is a matter of existential self-understanding, divorced from dependence on objectively revealed divine truths and external historical saving events, cannot man realize his own true nature independently of Jesus of Nazareth?

Bultmann concedes this possibility only in theory; he insists that God's prior initiative in Christ must in actuality be assumed because only in the proclamation (kerygma) about Christ has authentic existence been realized.

3. For the post-Bultmannian Ernst Kasemann, justification by faith becomes an epistemological principle opposed to the works of the Church as an ordered or structured institution. He divides the New Testament into a pure Protestant canon reflecting primitive Christianity ruled by the Holy Spirit, and an "early Catholic canon" reflecting ordination, a separation of clergy from laity, Church doctrine, and other supposedly institutional and hierarchial features. Here justification by faith is involved to destroy the New Testament canon. This refusal to accept the entire New Testament follows from an arbitrary, speculative, non-scripural reconstruction of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone; justification becomes a device for hearing only that part of the canon that Kasemann treasures.

4. Whatever else may be said about Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology—and it is not beyond serious evangelical criticism—he sees clearly that the right aim of historical method is not, as recent modern theology would have it, to plunge the believer into such uncertainty about history that he can only live by a leap of faith, but rather to ascertain knowledge about the past.

But so-called "left wing" post-Bultmannians take the other option. Fritz Buri and Schubert M. Ogden contend that the neo-Protestant understanding of "justification" has as its logical consequence the radical universal character of divine grace; to identify it solely with a divine act in Jesus Christ they consider to be an arrogant theological presumption (Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth,* New York, Harper & Brothers, 1961, pp. 145 f.). If Christian faith rests on no objective truth and no historical actualities, but depends rather upon a personal act of God in an event about which very little can be known, then radical faith becomes a universal possibility. Pointing to Bultmann's deliberate distinction of self-understanding from belief in the cross and resurrection of Christ as objective events, the left-wing post-Bultmannians ask: if faith is a passage from inauthentic to authentic existence, without necessary dependence on an objective historical event in the past, is such faith not a possibility for man as man? Ogden takes the coordination of justification with doctrinal disengagement seriously: the teaching that salvation is by Christ alone is labeled—not "absurdly" as Carl Braaten thinks (*New Directions in Theology Today: Vol. II: History and Hermaneutics,* London, Lutherworth Press, 1968, p. 85) but quite consistently with the existentialist premise—as "the final and most dangerous triumph" of "the heretical doctrine of works-righteousness." This heresy, he says, can now be avoided only by stressing "that God saves man by grace alone in complete freedom from any saving 'work' of any kind traditionally portrayed in the doctrines of the person and work of Jesus Christ" (*op. cit.,* p. 145).

With an eye on the unstable Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian defense of once-for-all disclosure in Jesus Christ the Word, Van Austin Harvey takes the final step. Since neo-Protestant theology equates faith with trust or decision and detaches revelation from both cognitive truth and specific historical beliefs, Harvey contends that the content of faith may be as readily mediated by historically false myths as by actual historical events (*op cit.,* pp. 280 f.). This view, he argues, "tries to take with utmost seriousness both the Protestant principle of justification by faith and the historical character of human existence, of which the morality of human knowledge is but a formalized constitutive part" (*ibid.,* p. 288).

Thus, the neo-Protestant restatement of justification by faith as an epistemological principle attaching faith to cognitive doubt finally succeeds in destroying justification by faith as a soteriological principle that attaches faith to God's saving revelation and redemption in Jesus Christ. A formless and contentless belief—rendered so by the loss of universally valid truth and of external historical grounding—must cut itself off from necessary connections with Jesus of Nazareth, from justification by faith in an authentically biblical understanding, and must attach itself instead to radical faith as a possibility available to every man as man. It is then free to draw its life-giving spirit from pseudo-scientific dogmas about the impossibility of miracle or the irrelevance of the supernatural, or

from historicist dogmas that dismiss Judeo-Christian revelation as myth by hardening modern doubt into anti-Christian finality. When justification by faith is thus perverted into the speculative theory that revelational truths and revelational history are efforts at self-justification, the essential connection of Christian faith with intelligible and historical revelation is sacrificed on the altar of scientific-historical positivism.

The recent epistemological perversion of this soteriological principle must be seen as a massive delusion of self-justification. In their self-disengagement from the cognitive content of Divine revelation, neo-Protestant theologians pleaded their personal humility and protested presumptive pride in the evangelicals' attachment to the truth of Scripture. But it should be crystal-clear that their modern justification of doubt is a pridefully presumptive repudiation of the rational content of the Living God's intelligible disclosure and of His redemptive acts in external history. The neo-Protestant reconstruction of justification by faith is, in fact, a massive self-delusion, a subtle self-justification of the contemporary revolt against reason and against revelation in its Judeo-Christian understanding.

A theology of this kind needs more than renewal: it needs God's forgiveness. All our theology, of course, stands always in need of purification by the inspired Scriptures; some of it needs to be purged. But can a speculative theology that guarantees its own justification in advance by correlating Divine acceptance with man's courageous ignorance, hope for a pardon of which it feels no need?

Ironically enough, evangelical theology must acknowledge that Roman Catholicism, whose misinterpretation of justification the Reformation protested, today has more understanding that does the influential vanguard of neo-Protestant theologians who have miscarried the doctrine to the point of mischief and misbelief. Were it not for the emerging radicals in the Church of Rome today, not a few evangelicals would seek liaison for probing of biblical justification by faith, particularly with devout Catholics who show a new respect for the Bible. The neo-Protestant perversion of justification is so much worse than the medieval misconstruction that ecumenical Christianity can now profit by a hearing of what the Scholastics had to say, although it is only through what the Scriptures have to say, of course, that, like Luther, we can find the way again.

Karl Barth could speak of the revelation of God as a clap of thunder in the Swiss Alps. For Paul Tillich, faith was like a flash of lightning that in a stormy night throws everything into a blinding clarity for just a moment. Barth's thunder has worn itself silent, and Tillich's momentary light has waned. The mind of modern man, whose doubt and meaninglessness even theologians venture to justify, stumbles in blindness and night. May God who justifies authentically, on His own terms, and in His own way, cause the Light to shine and the Word to be heard again. And may theology in our time experience forgiveness of sins in a gracious rediscovery and reproclamation of authentic justification by faith alone.